

Once There Was Three by Potterhead2739

Category: Stranger Things, 2016

Genre: Hurt-Comfort, Supernatural

Language: English

Characters: J. Hopper, Steve H.

Status: In-Progress

Published: 2018-06-19 16:40:10

Updated: 2019-08-28 08:30:28

Packaged: 2019-12-12 17:21:41

Rating: T

Chapters: 9

Words: 9,575

Publisher: www.fanfiction.net

Summary: Steve Harrington's always been cold. He didn't think about it much until he found out about all the crazy stuff in Hawkins. Now he's freaking out and in desperate need of real friends. Steve's not a jerk, but the people around him can be. Some Steve Hopper and Eleven family, Steve parenting Dustin and the others. TW dark themes, reference to abuse

1. Chapter 1

This is the short introduction to my Stranger Things fic. I don't know how long it'll be but I'll do my best to update weekly.

Disclaimer: I don't own Stranger Things, I wish I did tho, the Duffers Bros keep leaving us hanging.

Chapter 1:

Steve Harrington is ice.

He can't explain it. He's always been cold. His body is frozen. It's deep, settled in his bones. He's cool to touch. His parents kept the pool heated and the thermostat high. He didn't ask why. He's still cold though. It doesn't bother him. It never has. But he craved warmth.

There were girls, plenty of them. And he'd feel warm for a few hours. Then there was Nancy. He thought she was like fire. She made him feel warm, alive. Melted his icy exterior. She was everything he wanted and more. But they broke up and Steve wondered if she was like ice too. Snow, he decided, was more accurate. She was too perfect, too good, too pure to be anything less. She'd been there though. Unlike certain people.

His parents weren't there. His mother avoided him. His father was... well an asshole. And Steve was alone in that big house. He hated every second of it. They were rarely home so Steve had learnt to look after himself. He could cook, clean, treat his own injuries and buy groceries. It left him cold and empty and he wouldn't know if anything bad happened to them because they just didn't keep in touch. They avoided Steve like the plague. Steve just wished he knew why.

And then he'd met the kids. Those little shitheads. They'd shown him a world of absolute madness. Where monsters were very much real and teens knew more than adults. Where everything was, well, Upside Down. Steve had decided in about five seconds that he was protecting these kids no matter what. He'd been a little surprised to

learn that some adults were in on it and just how fucked up Hawkins was. Steve couldn't believe there had been a time where he was worried about being found out for underage drinking. It was all about perspective he supposed.

2. Chapter 2

I figured since the first chapter was so short I'd post another that actually y'know, has some plot. We finally understand the title, we finally meet other characters, we finally have pizza... wait no that's just my dinner. This update is because carrymehome very kindly gave me a review and I feel that should be rewarded.

Chapter 2:

When the gate was closed and Steve had driven everyone to the Byers for an emotional reunion, he kept in touch. Mainly with Dustin because Lord knew that kid needed help. He was going about things so wrong. And maybe Steve had a soft spot for the dipshit. Dustin caught him up on everything. He knew about Eleven, or Jane. About what she could do. He knew about Barb, the whole story from a year ago up until he started beating up Demogorgons with baseball bats. He felt terrible for Barb, for how callous he'd been. He felt worse for Bob. Honestly, he didn't know how everyone coped so well. Or at least they looked physically alright. Steve had bruises from his run in with Billy and yet the blood that had trickled down his face had felt cold not warm. But Dustin had said something, just in passing. Which was why he was currently sat in his father's study, looking through old newspapers. When Dustin had mentioned Hawkins lab and Doctor Brenner, a shiver had run down Steve's spine. He couldn't explain it. So, there he was looking through old newspapers and thanking his parents for being paper hoarders. He didn't even know why they kept the stupid things. When he finally found something with Doctor Brenner, Steve froze. And memories long forgotten came leaking through.

Steve had never been able to remember much of his childhood. He knew what he'd been told. He'd been home-schooled because his parents wanted him safe. When he'd turned eleven he had been allowed to go to school. The problem was Steve didn't actually remember having a home tutor except for a few months before going to school. He just figured the memories weren't that important. Seeing Doctor Brenner's picture however, changed his mind. He knew he'd seen the man before. He couldn't quite place it but he knew it

empty. Scary. And that he hated the man. He was also certain that he'd seen Dr. Brenner at his house at some point. Maybe he'd worked with his father. He didn't know. He did know that the man experimented on people with little restraint.

Steve dropped the paper and stormed out of his house, grabbing his keys on the way. He started driving, going anywhere that wasn't his house. He ended up at Dustin's and the little shit roped him into games. Steve didn't care though. He needed to be out of his house and somewhere warm. Somewhere alive. Dustin didn't ask why he was there but did ask for a ride to the Wheeler's place later. Steve agreed, guessing, correctly, that it was for D&D. Steve still didn't know how to play the game but he didn't begrudge the kids playing it all the time. He happily dropped Dustin off at the Wheeler's, asking if the kid needed to be picked up too. Dustin told him it was a sleep over and started off towards the house. Steve stayed to be sure he got in when he saw Jonathan there. With Nancy.

He knew he and Nancy were done. Knew that she and Jonathan were probably better for each other. But god it fucking hurt. It hurt like a son of a bitch. Steve stared, letting his heart ache and wishing that some kind of freak accident occurred to separate them. He sighed and turned back to drive. And holy shit his hands were frozen! Steve stared at the icicles forming along his hands and the steering wheel. He freaked out mentally before slamming his foot on the gas and getting the hell away from civilisation. He ended up in the middle of some woodland road desperately trying to remove his hands from the wheel. The more he panicked the worse it seemed to get. Ice was forming on his car. Steve started taking deep breaths.

"Come on Harrington. It's just a bit of ice. Breathe you idiot. Breathe." He muttered. When he calmed a little he managed to pull his hands free. He stared at his hands in bewilderment. "That's... new. Oh man, is this a side effect? Oh no way man." Steve groaned, thumping his head against the wheel. "I am not developing ice powers like those losers' comic book freaks." But he knew, he somehow knew that this was not a recent development. He knew that he'd done something like this before. Well maybe not freeze his hand to his car but something similar. Steve concentrated hard, trying to find the memory. He got flashes, glimpses of a hand, *his hand*, stuck to some

kind of pipe. Steve was jolted out of his memories by a tap at his window. Rolling it down, he saw Chief Hopper, Jane standing by his side, frowning at him.

"Harrington? What the hell are you doing here?" Hopper asked. Steve gave a weak smile.

"Oh, hey Chief." He said. "I was just thinking, y'know, getting my head on straight." Hopper couldn't have looked less like he believed him.

"Right, out of the car Harrington." Hopper said slowly. Steve stumbled out, wondering exactly why he'd been asked to get out. Hopper examined him with a flashlight. Jane looked at him oddly, cocking her head to one side. "And why are you getting your head on straight all the way out here?" Steve gulped.

"Just uh peace and quiet." He muttered. Hopper sighed and looked like he was contemplating checking the car to see if Steve was up to something else. Steve supposed he did have a reputation. The Chief probably thought he'd downed one too many. But Jane tugged on Hopper's sleeve and said something in the Chief's ear that Steve didn't hear.

"Get in, I'm driving you to my cabin." Hopper said. Steve nodded and hopped in the passenger side. Jane got in the back and Hopper drove for about ten minutes before pulling into the cabin. Steve hadn't realised he'd driven that far. He was hurried inside and sat on the couch, facing Jane. Hopper sat to the side and looked at Jane. She pointed at Steve.

"You know Papa?" She asked. Hopper raised a confused eyebrow but said nothing. Steve didn't respond. His mind was a mess. 'Papa' had some seriously negative connotations as far as he was concerned. Steve cleared his throat.

"You mean Dr. Brenner?" He asked. Jane nodded. "Yeah. I think I do. I'm not sure." Jane nodded.

"I understand." She said softly. "Your mind is... weird." Steve cocked his head.

"I might be having some memory issues." He shrugged. "But then I've never been that bright." Hopper gave a half snort behind him. Jane shook her head.

"More like... taken." She said. Steve raised an eyebrow at her but said nothing. She shuffled slightly, pulling her sleeve up. There was a mark 011 just below her wrist. Steve stared at the three black inked digits for what could have been hours before moving. His hands automatically went to his hip and he slightly pulled his jeans down to see the oh so familiar 003 printed onto his skin. Jane stared and a sound confirmed Hopper had moved.

"Lab." Jane said with a sense of finality. Steve pulled his jeans back up and shook his head.

"Can't be." He said. "I've lived with my parents all my life."

"You sure?" Jane asked. Steve opened his mouth but no words came out. To be honest he wasn't sure. He had no idea. Jane looked as if this settled the matter. "What do you do?" Steve hesitated. He wasn't one hundred percent sure but he was pretty sure he could freeze stuff. But it had been an accident in the car. He wasn't sure he could repeat it. Still he should try. Jane was probably the only person who would in any way understand. Steve looked around for something and saw a half-finished glass of water on the table. He picked it up and before Hopper could stop him, tipped it upside down. It fell onto his hand, freezing at his touch. He concentrated hard. He could almost feel the hands on his shoulder, telling him to concentrate, to focus. He's holding ice but it doesn't feel cold. Jane's mouth was slightly open as she reached across to poke the ice. It moved but didn't shatter. Hopper stared at Steve open mouthed, eyes disbelieving.

"Apparently I'm a human freezer." Steve joked, trying to ease the tension if only a little.

"Pretty." Jane said. Steve made a nervous sound before attempting to shove the ice back into the glass. He managed to and set the glass back on the table.

"I wouldn't call it pretty." Steve said.

"You're like me." Jane said. She seemed so happy that Steve didn't comment on the fact that he really wasn't. He was nowhere near as good as Jane. He was worse with his 'powers'. He had no idea what he was doing. Jane noticed his internal melt down and held out her pinkie finger. "Friends." Steve hesitated before extending his own pinkie and shaking. Jane smiled and Steve felt a gentle pat on the shoulder from Hopper.

"I should go." Steve said. Jane stared at him wide eyed. "I mean, this is a lot to process. And I just need some time. I'll... we can talk later." Jane nodded. Hopper offered to take him back but Steve shook his head and practically fled the cabin. Once he was back in his heated home, alone and shaken, Steve choked back a sob. His life was a lie. All of it. And suddenly, the chill of skin, the ice in his bones, had never felt more terrifying.

3. Chapter 3

I'm sorry, really sorry. I've been really busy, World Cup and all that. Anyway I wrote chapter 3 out and I hope you like it. Thank you my wonderful reviewers. You're the best.

Chapter 3:

Steve woke the next day not entirely sure how he'd ended up in bed. He shrugged it off before heading downstairs to make breakfast. He let the bacon sizzle as he poured some OJ. After finishing his meal, and cleaning up, Steve debated what to do. He could, possibly practice his abilities. He'd heard from Dustin that Jane got nosebleeds if she used hers. Steve hadn't experienced that at all so maybe he could manage. Filling a glass with water, Steve poured it onto the counter top letting it form a small puddle. He pressed one finger to the middle and watched the ice spread out. He focused and made it only freeze on one side. He wondered if he could melt it too. He concentrated, screwing up his face. Slowly, but surely, the ice started to melt. Steve mucked around with the puddle for hours, thinking he must have looked really pathetic.

He learnt that if he focused enough he could make defined shapes. He'd managed to make a square, a triangle. He was very impressed with himself. It was exciting to him. Yesterday it had freaked him out a bit, okay a lot. But today was different. The ice was looking every bit as pretty as Jane had said. It was like it was patterned just under the surface in a way Steve couldn't explain. He hadn't yet felt faint or even had a trickle of blood. He wanted to try more things and the pool outside beckoned him. He started slowly, freezing the water's surface. If he pushed hard enough it shattered. Steve pushed himself a little more, freezing it just that little bit extra until he was pretty sure the entire pool was frozen solid. Steve felt a rush performing such a big feat. Too late, he realised, that it was also dizziness. He hadn't noticed blood trickling down his nose, just as cold as his skin. Steve felt numb. He collapsed next to the pool. And no one was there to help him.

Hopped had turned up to the Harrington residence after debating with himself for a good few hours. He'd left Jane with the Wheeler's,

or rather allowed her to be secreted into the basement, and driven himself all the way over. After knocking on the door and ringing the doorbell a few times, he decided that no one was going to answer. He slipped round the back to see a very motionless Steve and a frozen solid pool. He understood what had happened immediately. He gently shook Steve's shoulder.

"Harrington?" He coaxed. "Come on kid, wake up!" Steve came to steadily. His eyes cracked open and he looked at Hopper blearily. Hopper couldn't stop the sigh of relief. "Do you think you can sit up?" Steve nodded shakily, slowly pushing himself up. Hopper kept a steady arm around his shoulders.

"Think I over did it." Steve muttered hazily. Hopper glanced at the pool.

"You think?" He queried. "Let's get you inside." He helped Steve up and managed to prop him on a stool by the counter. He shoved a glass of water into Steve's hand and sat down, promptly putting his elbow right in Steve's puddle. Steve gave him a sheepish look.

"I was practicing." Steve said. Hopper said nothing. At least it was only water. He did, however, avoid the puddle.

"So, you practiced yourself into collapse?" Hopper asked. Steve bowed his head.

"I know. I'm an idiot." He mumbled. Hopper sighed.

"Yeah, what if I hadn't come by?" He asked. "What if your parents had found you like that?"

"They wouldn't have." Steve said with such certainty that Hopper dropped it.

"Anyway. I came here to talk to you." He said.

"About what?" Steve asked, confused. He supposed it could have something to do with the fact he now had 'powers' but he figured that Hopper would just pull him aside when they bumped into each other, not seek him out.

"About Dr Brenner." Hopper said, gauging the kid's reaction. Steve froze. His body was rigid and a dark look crossed his face. The glass in his hand shattered, completely turned to ice. Steve didn't notice.

"Why do you want to talk about him?" Steve asked in a whisper. His face was stark white. Hopper felt a bit guilty, he supposed the kid had been traumatised by Dr Brenner just like Jane had and he had no right to ask Steve.

"I don't really understand everything that went down between him and Jane." Hopper explained. "I was hoping you could shed some light on it."

"Because you can't ask Jane." Steve said bluntly. "Because that might hurt her." Hopper felt his guilt increase, but he persisted, he had to do this for Jane.

"That man traumatised her and she doesn't know how to talk about it." Hopper said. "I want to help her. Just help me out here kid." Steve nodded slowly.

"Yeah, I get it. Jane is a bit young for this." He said.

"You're a bit young for this." Hopper said. "If you ask me all of you are too young for this." Steve gave him an odd look but said nothing.

"Honestly, I can't tell you much." Steve said. "I don't really remember anything. I think... I think Dr Brenner may have messed with my memory." Hopper nodded understandingly. "But I do know he scares me." Hopper didn't say anything. He really shouldn't have come here just to bombard Steve with questions.

"It's okay kid, you don't have to force yourself." Hopper said. Steve gave him a strained smile.

"Too late." He said. "I do remember him making me call him Papa. I don't know. The guy's a creep."

"Yeah. Alright kid, maybe you should get some rest. I think freezing the pool did one hell of a number on you." Hopper said, not willing to subject the kid to anymore painful memories. Steve nodded and headed upstairs. Hopper followed him, making sure the kid didn't fall

down the stairs or worse. When Steve bodily collapsed in bed Hopper finally asked the one question that had really been nagging him since he arrived. "Are your parents not around?"

"They're never around." Steve muttered into the pillow. Hopper frowned.

"When was the last time they were here?" He asked. There was a pause. A worrying, far too long pause.

"Dunno, few months I guess. Maybe more." Steve said, crawling into his bed more comfortably. "Can't really remember." Hopper swore under his breath. The Harrington's, the wealthiest people in Hawkins, were rarely seen but Hopper didn't think they just vanished for months at a time. "It's probably cos I'm here. They know somethings wrong with me. Ruins their perfect reputation." Hopper was livid but he kept his frustration in check. He rested a hand on Steve's shoulder.

"There ain't nothing wrong with you kid. You're different, special. Anyone who says otherwise can kiss my ass." Hopper said. "If there's nothing wrong with Jane, then there's nothing wrong with you." Hopper saw Steve's eyes gloss over slightly with tears and wondered if the kid's parents had ever told him he was special.

"Thanks Chief." Steve said. Hopper gave a half smile and nudged Steve so he would suffocate himself in a pillow. He touched Steve's bare skin and was surprised by how cold it was. He didn't say anything though. He didn't want to ruin the moment.

4. Chapter 4

Hey a new chapter is arriving. Has arrived. Whichever. It's time for the Party to see some of the weirdness and mom Steve is best Steve. Thank you again to my lovely reviewers, you guys are awesome.

Chapter 4:

Steve wasn't entirely sure how it happened. But he'd started spending a lot of time at Hopper's cabin. At first it had come under the guise of babysitting. Say what you will, but Steve knew he was a damn good babysitter. But sometimes Hopper was there and it seemed a little too frequent to just be babysitting. Not that Steve minded. He loved getting to leave his house for a reason.

Jane seemed to love having him over. Probably because he could do something as well. And he wasn't like the other girl she had met, Kali. It did make Steve wonder though. What the other kids with numbers were doing. He didn't ask. He liked the cabin though. He enjoyed his time with Jane, making her smile with the ice shapes. And he introduced her to real food, not the microwaved garbage that Hopper let eat.

Sometimes Hopper was there and Steve couldn't explain why he'd been summoned but he didn't argue. He cooked. Sometimes he cleaned because he could not stand the mess. Most of the time he spent explaining things to Jane. They'd look through Hopper's encyclopaedias if they didn't know something or ask the man himself. Of course, it was only a matter of time before those shitheads got suspicious. Steve was still spending time with Dustin, but not as much. And Jane still saw and talked to Mike, but not as much. So of course, Mike Wheeler turned up to Hopper's cabin late one day looking annoyed. Hopper was smoking and reading the paper while Jane watched Steve make a basic mac and cheese with added bacon.

"El?" Mike called. He marched into the unlocked cabin to see the unusual sight. "What are you doing here Harrington?" It wasn't that Mike didn't Steve, he didn't mind him. But the guy had dated his sister.

"What does it look like dumbass?" Steve grumbled, barely looking up from the stove. "I'm making dinner." Hopper gave a half snort before stubbing out his cigarette.

"Could ask you the same question." Hopper said, giving Mike a look.

"I came to see El." Mike said with determination. Steve sighed.

"Great, Jane, set another place for your boyfriend." He teased. Jane nodded and pulled out some cutlery while silently telling Mike to sit down. Mike didn't ask and did as he was told. Two minutes later and hot food was being served on his plate.

"So, Michael, why'd you drag your butt all the way here to see Jane?" Steve asked in a teasing tone. Jane rolled her eyes and Hopper gave Steve a half grin as he shovelled down some food. Lord he loved the kids cooking.

"I haven't seen her in a while. Not that it's any of your business Harrington." Mike said firmly. He just wanted to talk to Jane, or El as he still called her. She would always be El.

"I saw you two days ago at four-three-zero." Jane said.

"I know." Mike said fondly. "I just... we haven't been hanging out as much." Jane's eyes widened.

"Sorry Mike." Jane said. "Am I being a bad friend?"

"N-no. Not at all El, I just miss hanging like we used to." Mike stuttered and Steve tried to suppress his snort. Ah young love.

"Oh. We can hang tomorrow." Jane said, giving Hopper hopeful eyes. Hopper stared at her before nodding. Mike grinned. There was a comfortable silence around the table as they ate.

"That was really good. I didn't know you could cook Harrington." Mike said, feeling stuffed. Steve gave a shit-eating grin.

"There's a lot you don't know about me Wheeler." He said, collecting the dishes and starting to clean. Hopper stood up and gave a helping hand before Steve shooed him to do the drying instead. Mike did not

understand what was going on.

"El, why is he here?" He asked quietly. Jane stared at Mike. Friends did not lie to friends.

"He was looking after me and stayed." Jane said slowly. At one point they'd called it babysitting but Jane didn't like that.

"Oh. You can always come hang with me though. Y'know, if Hopper's at work." Mike said. Jane nodded.

"I like Steve." She said simply. Mike resented Steve for taking away Jane's attention. But he supposed that Hopper preferred an actual adult looking after Jane, even if it was Steve Harrington.

"I guess he's alright." Mike said, with a crinkled nose.

"Friend." Jane said with a nod. "He is like me." There was a shattering noise as one of the glasses Steve was holding turned to ice and broke. Jane frowned. She knew she wasn't supposed to tell people about Steve but this was Mike. And Mike knew about her and all the other stuff. Mike stared at Steve, open mouthed.

"Jane, what did we say about sharing things that aren't yours to share?" Hopper asked sternly.

"That I shouldn't." Jane sighed, bowing her head a bit. "Sorry Steve."

"S'okay kid." Steve said with a weak chuckle. "Figured they'd find out eventually." He looked at the shattered remains of the glass. "Sorry Chief. I'll get you a new one." Hopper patted him on the back.

"Don't worry about it Steve, it's just a glass." He said kindly. He couldn't accept anything else from the kid. He already cooked, and honestly Hopper was all the healthier for it. So was Jane. Hopper wondered when he'd effectively adopted a second child and if his past self could ever imagine that kid being Steve Harrington.

"Holy shit!" Mike exclaimed. Steve and Hopper looked at him.

"Okay nerdlord. I know this is all really confusing and that but I can't really explain it myself." Steve said bluntly. "I can freeze stuff and

that's all I know about now."

"But you... it's not... I don't." Mike stuttered. "You were in that lab too?" Steve sighed.

"It's complicated." He said. "I don't remember a whole lot, and I'd appreciate if you didn't tell all the other shitheads. Do and your ass is grass." Mike frowned.

"But this is important." He said. "I mean we have a right to know." Steve pinched the bridge of his nose. He knew that those shitheads had dealt with a lot more, understood a lot more but the hell he was telling them all about this.

"I'm not unloading my personal crap on you guys. Look Wheeler just keep your mouth shut for now alright?" Steve asked. Mike's frown deepened but he nodded. "C'mon, I'll drive you home." They said their goodbyes, Hopper clapping Steve on the shoulder and El giving them both a quick hug. When they parked outside the Wheeler residence, Steve saw Nancy and Jonathan sharing a kiss.

"Uh Steve?" Mike asked, slightly scared. Steve turned to him to see Mike staring at the steering wheel.

"Shit!" Steve swore. His hands had frozen to the wheel again. "Don't crap yourself Wheeler, it happens sometimes." Mike gave him an odd look before bolting out of the car. Steve watched him go inside before returning to his own empty home.

5. Chapter 5

Sorry for the late update but I've been really busy with coursework. I hope you like the Xmas themed chapter

Chapter 5:

Steve hadn't made any Christmas plans. After dropping Dustin off at the snowball, he'd spent most of time around Hopper's. He knew his parents wouldn't be back. He debated if he was bothered to even make a Christmas dinner like he used to, just on the off chance they did show up. He was lazing on his couch two days before Christmas, no preparation whatsoever when his doorbell rang. He opened it to see Dustin and the other shitheads, accompanied by Jane, Max, Hopper, Mrs. Byers and a very confused Jonathan and Nancy.

"Hey Steve!" Dustin exclaimed with a bright smile.

"Hey dipshit." Steve said, a half grin and confused look on his face. He leant against the door frame. "So, what brings you all the way out here?"

"We were thinking about having a Christmas party." Dustin said. Apparently, he'd been nominated speaker. "And you have the biggest place."

"A Christmas party." Steve repeated. "I don't have anything for a Christmas party."

"That's cool, we're having it tomorrow, but since we're invading your place we figured we should help set up." Dustin said eagerly. Steve just stood in his door, contemplating.

"We told them to call first." Joyce said with exasperation. "To check if that's alright with you and your parents."

"My parents aren't here." Steve said stiffly. Joyce frowned slightly and looked ready to ask something but Steve cut her off. "Alright a party, you know I'm always down for those. Let's see what you have." The kids grinned before storming into his house and checking out his

kitchen and living room.

"No tree, I'm disappointed Steve." Max said teasingly. Steve gave a half smile.

"What can I say, I try my best to disappoint." He said with a mock bow. Max chuckled.

"Okay guys let's make a list." Mike said, being the leader of the ragtag team. They started writing down all the things they needed and Steve just let them. Joyce and Hopper tapered down the really outrageous suggestions (a chocolate fountain, really guys) and Jonathan and Nancy had offered good alternatives.

"What about cooking though?" Lucas asked. "I mean we can't just eat raw stuff."

"Steve has to cook." Mike said. "He's really good."

"Yes. Steve good." Jane added. Everyone turned to Steve who smiled meekly.

"What can I say, I'm a madman with a frying pan." Steve joked weakly.

"You can cook?" Jonathan asked, the first to recover. "I always figured..."

"That my parents did? That I live off microwaveable crap like the Chief? Or that someone did it for me?" Steve fired off. He'd heard the stories about his family. Knew what people expected when they saw him. Jonathan flushed slightly.

"Are you suggesting that Steve is the best cook?" Joyce asked, eyes sparkling with mischief.

"He has my vote." Hopper said, leaning back on the couch. Steve grinned.

"What kind of food did you little dorks have in mind anyway?" He asked.

Steve must have been mental, absolutely mental. But there he was, two days before Christmas buying a tree, buying food and other assorted goods. The checkout lady gave him odd looks but he ignored it in favour of getting back to his home and setting up. He knew the shithheads would love it and that made him feel warm inside. No, he wasn't going soft. He couldn't wait to see their faces. He knew he'd have to get up early the next day so decided to hit the hay early. Getting up to cook for other people was a novelty Steve was starting to enjoy. When the doorbell rang at midday, he gave a shout to say it was open while removing a healthy slab of meat from the oven.

"Oh, Steve it smells lovely." Joyce sighed. "Here let me help."

"Nah Mrs Byers. I can manage." Steve said with a grin.

"Steve likes cooking alone." Jane said. "He got bitchy when Hopper tried to help."

"Language." Hopper said fondly.

"I did not get bitchy." Steve retorted. Hopper gave him a look and Steve turned back to his cooking. "You can always get out some plates and stuff if you really want to help Mrs. Byers." Joyce immediately starting searching for the appropriate tableware.

"You can call me Joyce." She said, pulling out a stack of plates.

"Of course, Mrs Byers." Steve said with a smile. Joyce let out a light chuckle and began ushering the kids away from the food.

"Anything we can do?" Nancy asked, Jonathan at her side.

"You can keep those little nerds out of my kitchen." Steve said. Nancy and Jonathan managed to wrangle the smaller kids into the living room, letting them mess around with the board games they'd brought. Steve was pulling out trays of food and effectively setting up a buffet in the kitchen. Joyce was happy to help him arrange everything while Hopper pulled out drinks and wordlessly handed Steve some Eggos.

"Looks great kid." Hopper said gruffly.

"No wonder you've been looking healthier." Joyce teased. "Honestly, a woman could get used to this."

"Yeah, kid'll make a great house wife someday." Hopper joked. Steve rolled his eyes, focusing on melting cheese over some nachos. When he finished plating the last of the food, the phone rang.

"I got it, Joyce can you get those shi- uh kids in here?" Steve asked, catching himself before he called Joyce's son a shithead. Joyce nodded, suppressing a laugh. Steve picked up the phone.

"Harrington residence, Steve speaking." He said politely.

"Steven." His father responded crisply.

"Oh, hey Dad." Steve said unenthusiastically.

"Your mother and I are still out in Orlando, we're not going to be back until after New Year's." His father said.

"Right." Steve said, not particularly caring, at least they'd called this time.

"I need you to pick something up for me in the meantime." His father continued. "The order should be coming into my local office, I need you there on the 28th." Of course, it wasn't that they actually cared, no Steve was just a pack mule for them.

"Yeah, sure Dad." Steve sighed. "What time?"

"Between nine and three." His father replied. Steve figured into couldn't have been vaguer. "Also, when we come back the house had better not be a mess like last time." Steve wanted to scream down the receiver. It had barely been a mess last time and he'd still gotten shit for the glasses he'd forgotten to wash.

"It will be." He said. "Have a merry-." He'd hung up. Steve slammed the phone on the receiver, leant against the wall and sighed. "Party face Harrington, come on." He plastered on a smile and headed back in the kitchen to find it in absolute chaos. Dustin was threatening Lucas with a whisk, while Lucas ignored him and vied for Max's attention. Max however, was throwing things for Jane to catch and

move around. Mike was trying to get Jane's attention while Will seemed to just be enjoying the show, eating little pieces of the buffet. The 'adults' weren't being much help either. Hopper was lounging on a chair next to Joyce, sipping beer and chatting about nothing in particular. Nancy was feeding Jonathan while he tried to snap pictures. Steve supposed it was alright until Dustin effectively started a food war, causing food and napkins to go everywhere. "WHAT THE ACTUAL FUCK ARE YOU LITTLE SHITHEADS DOING?" Everyone turned to look at him. Steve took a deep breath. "Dustin, get off that stool or so help me I will drive your sorry ass back home. Lucas, stop provoking Dustin, it's not helping. Max, don't laugh, and don't use a plate as a shield. Mike, don't shake that stool any more, I know Dustin is a pain but we don't want him to actually die. Do it later when the police chief isn't around and I have plausible deniability. Jane, please don't levitate food, its for eating, not throwing. Will-." Steve cut himself off. The younger Byers looked a little shell-shocked. "Will, you're an absolute angel, I'm so happy someone doesn't feel the need to trash other people's homes." Steve sent a pointed glare at Dustin, who promptly hopped off the stool.

"Steve, you're being such a mom." He said with a laugh. Steve huffed. "You're even doing your mom pose."

"What?" Steve asked, confused. "I don't have a mom pose."

"Yeah you do." Lucas said. He snickered. "You look like my mom when she's annoyed. Hands on hips and a frown." Steve frowned.

"Well Shitheads, if you're nominating me mother than I suppose you won't mind me telling you to clean up the mess you made." He shot back.

"What?!" They chorused. "But Steve-."

"I don't want to hear it, I want my kitchen returned to some semblance of normal." Steve said. The kids pouted and complained. "If you clean it all, then you can keep eating and I'll whip up a special Christmas cake." The kids looked tempted. "With Eggos and ice cream." That sorted it, the kids immediately jumped into action. Nancy and Jonathan helped out, mainly so the shitheads didn't kill themselves. Steve slumped into a chair by Hopper and Joyce. "I need

a drink." Hopper wordlessly handed him a cup of apple juice. Steve snorted but drank it anyway.

"I'm impressed Steve." Joyce said with a warm smile. "They listened to you."

"I have my moments." Steve said, chugging the juice. Hopper snorted. He glanced at Steve, who looked pretty done at that moment. Keeping order in a house full of middle-schoolers did that to a man.

"So, kid, parents aren't around for Christmas?" He asked. Steve's face immediately darkened.

"No." He said stiffly. "They're back after New Years'." Hopper nodded.

"How about you spend it with me and Jane?" He asked gruffly. Steve made an incoherent noise.

"You just want me to cook for you, don't you?" Steve teased. Hopper let out a short chuckle.

"Well that's one reason. Jane would like it too." He replied in an equally teasing tone.

"Sure, got nothing better to do." Steve agreed, letting them fall into comfortable silence.

6. Chapter 6

I am so sorry about the long gaps between updates I'm kinda hopeless. I really hope that the people still reading this fic don't hate me too much. Constructive criticism is always welcome.

Chapter 6:

Steve arrived at Hopper's on Christmas Day with a big smile on his face. After dodging the various traps and trip wires, he knocked the special knock on the door. The door opened by itself, revealing a very happy Jane. She pulled him inside, barely letting him deposit his bag under the small tree. Hopper was stood in the kitchen, making faces at a very raw turkey.

"Steve." He said gruffly.

"Shoo, out of the kitchen." Steve said, almost impatiently but with a teasing smile. Hopper almost looked relieved. Steve set about making Christmas dinner. He left the turkey in the oven, heading to the living room. Jane was waiting patiently for him.

"Presents?" She asked, a slight inflection in her voice. Hopper rolled his eyes but nodded. After the party, Steve had handed Hopper his and Jane's gifts, waving off the 'You didn't have to'. He'd given the other kids their presents too, ushering them out and cleaning up the remains of mess in his kitchen. Jane started ripping through paper, eyes wide and excited. She'd gotten a dictionary, encyclopaedias (that Steve suspected belonged to Hopper before), one of those writing books for handwriting, a plushie toy, some new clothes (really, Steve thought, did she like flannel that much?), her own Walkie talkie (Steve suspected it had something to do with Mike) and a book of fairy tales (Steve had deliberately picked the one with the nice ending and princesses). Jane looked ecstatic. She looked up at Hopper with the most genuine smile anyone had seen in a while. Hopper smiled back.

Three presents promptly ended up right by Hopper. He looked surprised. One was from Joyce (a scrapbook of all things, but Hopper gave a half smile), another from Steve (he'd given him a cook book of

simple meals, handwritten of course, to suit Hopper's taste). Hopper had patted Steve on the shoulder. If anyone asked, the man would deny the smile on his face. Hopper stared at the poorly wrapped gift that was left. He supposed it could be from Flo but by the way Steve was grinning it didn't seem like it. Hopper unwrapped the gift to find a mug with the words 'number 1 Dad' written on it. Jane smiled brightly. Steve had taken her aside at the party and asked her if she understood Christmas. She had given him this odd look and said something along the lines of 'Mike said it was a holiday'. So, he'd explained it the best he could, missing out the weirder parts that he figured might be a bit hard to grasp. When Jane got the gist of it, she asked about gifts. She and Steve talked for a bit, Steve promising that he'd get the gift for Hopper for her (he managed to negotiate for some babysitting power over her). She hadn't been too sure but Steve managed to grasp what she was asking for so he got it. Hopper stared wordlessly at it. He looked between a brightly smiling Jane and a grinning Steve.

"Thanks." He said gruffly. Later, he would deny that the corners of his eyes had pricked with tears. And if the mug ended up on his desk at work, no one needed to know.

When dinner was finally ready, Jane looked like her eyes might pop out of her head. It was definitely one of the more extravagant meals Steve had cooked for them. Hopper patted his shoulder, telling him it looked great while Jane didn't know where to start. Hopper carved the turkey, serving up a little of everything onto Jane's plate. She managed to restrain herself long enough for Steve and Hopper to get their own portions. Jane nibbled, which Hopper thought was cute. Steve smiled and burst out laughing when Jane spat out a sprout like it was the most disgusting thing on Earth.

"Don't worry Jane, I don't like them either." Steve said, piling some broccoli (who has broccoli at Christmas?) onto her plate instead, removing the sprouts. Hopper sighed, realising that meant the sprouts fell to him. The food was polished up, Hopper hiding the left overs for another day. Jane and Steve sat in the living room reading through the book of fairy tales. Steve read in a way that reminded Hopper of a parent, giving each character a different voice. He watched fondly as Jane curled into Steve's side and slowly fell asleep.

It wasn't long before Steve started dozing himself, book falling to the floor with a thump. Jane woke up, eyes half lidded with sleep. Steve yawned widely.

"I should be going." He hummed. Jane looked upset as Steve stood up, stretching out the cricks.

"Wait kid." Hopper said, pulling something out of the dresser. He handed Steve an oddly wrapped gift. "From me and Jane."

"Oh, you didn't have to." Steve said, echoing Hopper.

"Shut up and open it." Hopper said with a roll of his eyes. Steve carefully pulled the paper apart. It was a little snow globe with a cabin and snowman inside. "It's nothing fancy, Jane thought you'd like it." Steve didn't respond for a bit.

"Yeah. I really do." Steve murmured. Hopper frowned, he didn't think it was that bad a gift. Looking closer he could see Steve holding back tears. Jane hopped to her feet and pressed herself between Hopper and Steve.

"Shake." She said. Steve gave her a watery smile and gave the globe a little shake. Jane smiled, pointing at the cabin. "Home." She said.

"Home." Steve agreed. If Steve fell asleep on the sofa that evening, clutching the snow globe. Well, stranger things had happened.

7. Chapter 7

Sorry my dudes for the long break, got kicked on my ass by exams. Saw ST 3 and liked it a lot, my boy Steve really took a class in dumbass huh. Anyway owing to this being a short chapter I'm gonna post two today. Super trigger warning for abuse both verbal and physical, also slurs.

R&R or F&F if you like, constructive criticism is loved and probably needed.

Chapter 7:

The rest of the year passed in a cosy haze. Steve picked up his parents' package, babysat the kids, ignored the stabbing pain in his heart when thinking of Nancy and Jonathan, cooked for Hopper and Jane. New Years was a blast (and not just because of the fireworks). Steve was ready to start the next year, but if his track record held something even worse would happen. He completely forgot that his parents were due back. It shocked him when they walked into the house, interrupting his ritualistic scrub down of the stove.

"Nice to see you actually listen to us." His father muttered. His mother gave him a stiff smile.

"It's good to see you." She said and all Steve could think was how bad a liar she was.

"Yeah. Good to see you too." Steve managed. They all went about their business, Steve continued his cleaning, Mr Harrington went into his study and Mrs Harrington went to unpack. Steve figured if he kept his head down and didn't do anything he couldn't possibly put them in a bad mood. But like with most of Steve's ideas it didn't quite go to plan.

Steve barely ducked when the bottle was thrown at him. It shattered against the wall, inches from his head. His father was in a mood.

"James, please." Mrs Harrington said weakly.

"Not now Adelaide!" James Harrington snapped, towering over his son. "This useless fucker needs to learn to be more responsible." Steve bit back the retort about how he'd been pretty damn responsible, none of those shitheads had died, yet. James held a piece of paper in his hand. "Maybe if he wasn't such a colossal fuck up and didn't keep fucking around with his friends he'd have better grades." Steve lowered his head slightly. So, it was about his report card. Steve knew he wasn't the brightest person, not by a long shot but he wasn't stupid. Well, not that stupid. He averaged C's in most classes and had a B in home economics. But that would never be good enough. Adelaide looked at the report card, wincing slightly.

"It... could be worse." She managed. "Look there's a B here."

"In home economics." James said through gritted teeth. "I didn't raise a fucking fag, doing homo shit like cooking."

"You barely raised me at all!" Steve snapped. He regretted the words as soon as they left his mouth.

"The fuck did you say to me?!" James roared. Adelaide stepped away, retreating to another room. Leaving Steve to deal with his irate father. Somewhere between all the punching and kicking and screaming ('useless so fucking useless') Steve managed to make a break for the door. He made it, sprinting out, forgoing shoes, socks or his car keys. He just ran. And ran. And ran. His legs carried him all the way to Hopper's cabin. He knocked the special knock and came face to face with Hopper. The look of annoyance on the older man's face disappeared into a look of concern at the sight of Steve on the doorstep.

"Jesus kid, are you alright?" He asked.

"Can I come in?" Steve asked in a timid voice. Hopper said nothing, letting Steve in and shutting the door behind him.

8. Chapter 8

Chapter 8:

Steve Harrington, Jim Hopper decided, was an enigma, wrapped in a riddle, shoved in a puzzle and locked in a damn safe. He was a kid with too many damn layers to be healthy. When he'd first heard about the kid it had been 'son of James and Adelaide Harrington, bit of a jerk, petty crime'. Hopper hadn't particularly liked the kid. Every time a report came across his desk about the kid. He'd sigh and read through it. The more he read, the less he disliked him. Steve ultimately wasn't a bad guy, sure he did stupid things, a lot of stupid things, but he would take responsibility.

When he'd heard about the graffiti about Nancy Wheeler, however, his opinion changed again. He had been disappointed, right up until he saw Steve up a ladder cleaning up what he'd done looking every bit as contrite as he should have while the cinema workers bustled around (he'd asked later when he'd had less pressing matters, impressed to hear the kid had owned up and offered to help of his own volition). He'd seen the kid when they'd had to sign those secrecy act forms. Steve had had an irritated look on his face as he filled them out. Hopper couldn't blame him but he also didn't exactly know how Steve Harrington of all people knew about the situation. He left Nancy Wheeler to keep an eye on him.

A year later and Hopper found himself standing in the Byers' front room with Steve wielding a baseball bat. When he returned to the Byers he saw that same kid covered in blood lounging on the couch. He let Joyce deal with him, having his own charge to worry about. It wasn't until late that night when Steve was passed out on the couch that Hopper got the full story. He flipped between wanting to shake the kid for letting thirteen-year olds be so reckless and commending him for managing to maintain some semblance of control while protecting a bunch of maniacs. He'd left, thinking they could manage. Then Steve had powers and managed to worm his way into Hopper's life.

Now that same kid, whom he'd come to adore, was sat on his couch covered in forming bruises and cuts. He wasn't wearing anything on

his feet. The thin t-shirt was soaked from the rain, sticking to Steve like tape. Jane was awake, carefully examining Steve. Hopper decided that Steve needed to be treated for whatever the hell had happened. He could ask later. It was a long process. Steve had tried to wave him off, tried to stop him from actually examining him. Hopper was having none of it and managed to peel off the tee. He stayed calm as he bandaged and cleaned Steve's wounds. When he went to the kitchen, his heart dropped. He didn't really have much ice.

"Sorry kid." Hopper said. "I don't have many ice packs."

"Water." Steve rasped. His throat hadn't looked too hot. Hopper obliged, watching as Steve poured the water over himself, freezing it. Hopper made an odd noise.

"Not exactly what I thought you were going to do." Hopper admitted. Steve gave him a lopsided grin.

"Solves the ice problem." Steve murmured. Hopper nodded, sitting down next to Steve. Jane draped a blanket over Steve, who didn't seem to realise he was, or rather should be, cold.

"What the hell happened kid?" Hopper asked, he'd never been tactful or delicate.

"Got into an argument." Steve muttered. He grinned at Hopper. "We all know I've never been a good fighter." Hopper remembered. Jonathan Byers (kid could be damn violent) and Billy Hargrove (there was a story there but Hopper was looking after too many kids already). Still, Hopper thought it was a bit late for Steve to get into a fight.

"Who with?" Hopper asked. Steve didn't answer and Hopper felt his stomach turn. "Kid, let me help you."

"M'fine." Steve muttered, not that Hopper believed him. It sounded like breathing hurt.

"Fine." Hopper sighed. "You're staying here tonight though." Steve nodded, slowly shifting on the sofa. Jane and Hopper moved, letting

Steve stretch himself out. Jane tugged the blanket more securely over him, Steve gave her a weak smile. Hopper pulled Jane into her room.

"Will he be okay?" Jane asked, a small inflection creeping into his voice. Hopper rubbed a hand over his face.

"He should be." He said. He wasn't going to lie or make a promise he couldn't keep. "We'll look after him."

"Look after." Jane repeated with a nod. She gave Hopper an uncertain look. "Was it Papa?" Hopper looked down at this tiny girl with enough power to destroy Hawkins. She was scared.

"I don't think so." Hopped assured her. "Steve would have told us." Jane nodded and allowed Hopper to tuck her into bed. Hopper went back and asked Steve, just to be safe. He relaxed minimally when Steve assured him it was nothing to do with Doctor Brenner. Hopper drifted off to sleep, feeling a deep unease in his stomach. If it wasn't Doctor Brenner, then who had hurt Steve so badly?

9. Chapter 9

Updates finally occurred. Going through that tough stage of writers block where you know the rough plot but man is it difficult to get there. Only a short one I'm afraid folks.

Chapter 9:

Hopper should have realised that Steve wouldn't sleep easily. He spent half the night by the sofa, calming Steve. There wasn't any screaming, any wailing. There were silent tears, soft whimpers. There was Steve biting down on his lip so hard that it bled. None of those things had woken Hopper. What had woken him up was the cold. Hopper knew it got cold at night, especially in winter. But the five-degree drop woke him up with a start. He half expected to find Steve shivering, instead he found a Steve trapped in a nightmare that was the source of the cold. Steve didn't wake up once. Hopper heard words, murmurs that sent shivers up his spine. Hopper made it until seven before he decided enough was enough and left the cabin. He left a note for Jane and Steve before hopping into his Beamer. The drive to the Harrington's was long. It wasn't normally but Hopper felt like he was moving in slow motion. He knocked sharply on their door.

"Yes?" James Harrington asked, glaring at whoever was knocking that early. Hopper shifted, feeling uncomfortable.

"Mr Harrington, we need to talk about Steve." He said firmly. James rolled his eyes.

"What's he done now?" James asked. Hopper resisted the urge to simply punch the man, tell him Steve was staying with him and move on.

"Nothing." Hopper said firmly. "He hasn't done a single thing wrong."

"So then why are you here?" James asked, an edge to his voice.

"Tell me Mr Harrington, do you think it's okay to hit your own child?" Hopper asked, a dangerous edge to his voice. James Harrington

glared.

"What's he saying? That I hit him?" James snapped back. "It'll do the boy some good."

"No. It won't." Hopper said firmly. "That boy is hurting, you hurt him."

"Nothing the freak didn't deserve." James said dismissively. Hopper resisted the urge to punch the man. To beat the crap out of him.

"James? James what's going on?" Adelaide asked, creeping up to join her husband.

"Steven said we hit him like he didn't deserve it." James said through gritted teeth. Adelaide's eyes widened.

"Oh no Chief, Steve just requires a bit of discipline sometimes that's all." She said quickly.

"Not the amount of damage you're doing." Hopper shot back.

"Where is Steven?" Adelaide asked, eyeing Hopper's car as if Steve would jump out.

"He's safe." Hopper said. James rolled his eyes.

"Good. Well tell him he can stay in 'safe'. I've had it with his shit." He said. Hopper nodded.

"I'll pass along the message." He started to leave when he heard them whispering.

"I told you we should have just left him with Doctor Brenner." James muttered.

Ten seconds. Ten seconds was all it took for Hopper to turn around, march back to the house and punch James Harrington clean in the face. The man dropped to the floor and snapped about calling the police.

"Too bad asshole. I am the police." Hopper said, storming back to his

car.